

boyish sins to one of the fathers, and then rode off to perform the act of sober courage which, in spite of all the follies of his manhood, half redeems his memory. He was followed by his troop, whose confidence, whether by means of these pious emotions or by the fierce excitement of the game which they had to play, was now fully restored and ready for all that might follow. It had been determined to meet the rebels once again, at Sniithfield. Another alternative was to ride off from Westminster into the country and rouse the loyalists of England against London. Such a course might have been safer for the royal party personally, but would have been more dangerous to the commonwealth. To leave London and its citizens in the hands of exasperated rebels would have been to court a terrible revenge. Besides, the country itself was still in the hands of rioters, who would have to be subdued. The king's counsellors undoubtedly chose the right course in first securing London as a basis.<sup>1</sup>

The famous meeting took place in Smithfield, a market square, more or less completely enclosed by houses, lying outside the walls of London not far from New Gate. It was even then infamous for the <sup>f</sup> great and horrible smells and mortal abominations/<sup>2</sup> which sullied its fair fame as a cattle market down to the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was the hour of vespers. The rebels, who had assembled there in obedience to the King's proclamation, were mustered under the royal banners granted to them at Mile End; they were headed by a man who was afterwards generally known as Wat Tyler. His name does not render it certain that he was a tiler by trade ; he may have been a peasant. But at any rate he was a man of the people, and not one of those gentlemen who in some places consented to lead the rebels. He may have gained his position either by really superior talents as an organiser, or, as some of the leaders of the French Revolution gained theirs, solely by a sufficient display of audacity. One of the King's attendants declared that he recognised him at Smith-field as one of the most notorious rogues and robbers in Kent, but there is no impartial evidence sufficient to warrant conjecture as to his character or previous career.<sup>3</sup> He rode

<sup>1</sup> Higden, ix. 4-5; *H. R.*, 518.

*Parl.*, iii. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Rot.*

» See Ap.